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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the relevant literature on approaches by school counselors to enhance the self-concept of high school students. Seventeen journal articles and five microfiche articles published over a period of five years, between 1991 and 1996, were examined. These reviewed sources were identified through an ERIC search. In an attempt to present a balanced review, both surveys and experimental studies are included. The review is organized into the following subheadings: Parental Awareness, Academic Achievement, Student Programs, and Group Counseling Programs. Much of the research showed no significant relationship between sexual activity or teen parenting and self-esteem. A negative correlation was found between eating disorders and positive self-concept. The research on academic achievement and family situation in regard to self-concept appears to be contradictory. Some researchers found a significant correlation, while others found no correlation. The author notes that continued study in this area would clarify which results are accurate, thereby increasing the data used by school counselors to help enhance the self-concepts of high school students. (Contains 21 references.) (GCP)

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Approaches by School Counselors to Enhance the Self-Concept of High School Students: A Review of Related Literature

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Relevant literature was reviewed on approaches by school counselors to enhance the self-concept of high school students. Sources were identified through an ERIC search. Seventeen journal articles and five microfiche articles were examined. Literature reviewed included survey and experimental studies, and was therefore well balanced. Investigators found no significant correlation between sexual activity or teen parenting and self-esteem. Researchers showed a relationship between self-concept and eating disorders, home situation, and academic achievement of high school students.

Twenty-two sources on approaches by school counselors to enhance the self-concept of high school students were identified by an ERIC search and then reviewed. The articles were published over a period of five years, between 1991 and 1996. One study from 1983 was used because it seemed relevant and useful to the review. It was the only study available that tested the participation in a "self-concept enhancement program," (Burnett 1983) and its increased effect on the self-esteem of high school students. Five articles are from microfiche. The review is organized into the following subheadings, in this order: Parental Awareness, Academic Achievement, Student Programs, and Group Counseling Programs.

PARENTAL AWARENESS

Several of the articles reviewed studied parental effect on the self-concept of adolescents. Dew and Huebner (1994) conducted a study to test the correlation between the quality of life and self-esteem in high school students. They distributed four questionnaires to each of the 222 subjects to gain data about the subjects' "perceived quality of life" and self-concept. Their results showed that the higher the students' perceived quality of life (including the students' home situation), the higher the students' self-esteem. This was a well-done study for several reasons. In addition to questioning the subjects, their parents also answered questions about their child's self-esteem. The questionnaires were short, to the point and closed. The latter makes for easier and more accurate tabulation of results. One problem with the results was that the researchers say they only got a "rough estimate" for the socioeconomic status of the subjects. More exact figures would have made for more valid results.

Several other researchers also tested the correlation between students' parental situation and self-concepts. Unlike Dew and Huebner (1994) these studies concluded that there was little or no correlation between parental situation/interaction and a child's self-concept. The way authors came to this conclusion was very different. Wiggins, Schantz and West (1994) used all of their subjects from one middle school. Perhaps if the same procedures were used in other areas with different socioeconomic status, the results would have been changed. Much of the literature reviewed in the articles is from the seventies and early eighties. Therefore, this would have produced an obsolete theoretical framework for the study.

Lee (1995) conducted a study on the self-esteem of junior and senior high school students in relation to family situations. She hypothesized that birth order, family size, quality of family life and maternal employment would not effect self-esteem. All students present at the chosen school, on the day of the study participated. One hundred sixty-six, seventh through twelfth grade students completed questionnaires which included open and closed questions. The results showed students with high quality of family life had high self-esteem. Also, students of first and last birth order had higher self-concepts than did middle children. Students from families of four or more children had higher self-esteem then students from families with less than four children. Maternal employment had no effect on the students' self-concept.

In the study done by McCullough, Ashbridge and Pegg (1994) one hypothesis was supported, and it was found that students in leadership positions were more likely to come from stable, two parent homes. However, another hypothesis was not supported, and it was found that holding leadership positions had no effect on the subjects' self-

esteem. The study was well done. There was an experimental group and a control group: both randomly selected. The researchers made certain answers were unbiased by using the double blind approach. One weakness of the study was that 75% of the random sample live with both of their biological parents. The results may have turned out differently if the single/stepparent group had been larger, thereby having a more evenly distributed subject group.

Holland and Andre (1994) performed a study to test the correlation between "personal and environmental resources" and self-esteem in high school and college students. In the complete and thorough review of literature, they reported that there was no correlation between parental marital status, environmental resources and the self-esteem of the subjects. The sample of subjects was large (648 students) and had a relatively even number from each representative group. The surveys and questionnaires distributed were closed with a low number of questions. This helped keep the subjects interested, and made for more accurate and easier result analysis. Supporting the hypothesis, the results showed no relationship between parental situation, environmental resources and self-esteem.

Nielsen and Metha (1994) tested the correlation between parental behaviors and the self-esteem of adolescents. They studied students in a public high school, as well as adolescents admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Similar to other researchers, their hypothesis was not supported and no connection was found between parental behaviors and self-esteem. Nielsen and Metha's (1994) review of the literature went into great detail about what self-esteem is, and what other researchers have found regarding the effects of parents on the self-esteem of their teenagers. Although Nielsen and Metha's

(1994) review of the literature was well written, many of the articles used were outdated. This caused the theoretical framework to be less than up-to-date.

The final article reviewed studied the relationship between parental awareness and adolescent self-esteem and is slightly different than the other articles. Clark and Blake (1993) studied how "parental verbal interaction" relates to adolescent self-esteem. The results showed that kids who believe they have been verbally abused have lower self-esteem than children who perceive no abuse. One weakness of the study is that only 64 subjects were tested. In addition, there was no information on how the questionnaires were distributed to the subjects. There was no indication of whether the subjects were monitored while completing the surveys. If the subjects discussed the survey with anyone, it could skew the results due to other peoples' influence on the way the subjects answer the questions. In addition, all 64 subjects were white. It is possible that because of differing cultural beliefs, subjects of other races would not produce the same results as the white subjects.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Based on the literature reviewed, there is a strong indication that self-concept among adolescents was correlated with academic achievement. Wiggins, Schantz and West (1994) found a strong positive correlation between grade point average and self-esteem. The subjects were given the self-esteem index in a monitored classroom at the beginning and end of the school year. The Self-Esteem Inventory was used because of its "moderate to high reliability and validity." All non-special students at one school completed the questionnaire.

Marsh (1992) also studied academic self-concept and overall self-concept. He hypothesized that academic self-concept is subject related. For example, he believed a student with a high math grade would have a high self-concept about math ability. Marsh (1992) tested 507 subjects. All the subjects were males attending a Catholic school in Australia, therefore it is probable that the results would be different in varying cultures, or if females were included in the study. However, in the study he found his hypothesis supported, and showed that academic self-concept was subject related.

Strein (1993) also wrote an article on academic self-concept. The review of the literature was relevant, pertinent and up to date. He effectively and critically evaluated previous studies. He pointed out possible problems with the research while presenting the findings. Strein (1993) discussed the relationship between academic achievement and self-esteem, effects on self-concept formation, and recent findings on self-concept.

Igor and Sullivan (1993) took a different approach to the study of academic motivation in students. They studied the "return-to-task" rates for students on hard and easy tasks. The subjects were seventh, ninth and eleventh grade students in the lower middle to upper middle socioeconomic status. There was an even number from each grade, as well as an even number of male and female subjects. A teacher monitored the surveys distributed in a classroom. However, participants in the study were volunteers, which could skew the results based on the personality type of those willing to participate in surveys. It was found that when monitored by an adult, the subjects (especially the females) returned to easier tasks more often than to hard tasks. The researchers believed this was the subjects' way of making themselves look smarter and more confident to the adults.

Lundenberg, Fox and Puncochar (1994) also compared gender differences and confidence levels in academic achievement. However, they found both men and women were overconfident in their academic abilities. All the subjects were psychology students and volunteers to the study. In addition, there were twice as many females as males in the study, which may effect the results. Men and women tend to answer survey questions differently because of social disparities.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals studied several philosophies on how to successfully run a school. It found that when a safe environment is provided for students and the school personnel expects the students' success, the students have a higher self-concept and higher grades.

Unlike the other studies, the research done by Sterbin and Rakow (1996) showed no correlation between academic achievement, test scores and self-esteem. They randomly selected 12,260 subjects from the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study. Sterbin and Rakow's (1996) study had high validity because of the random selection of the large subject group. The students were unaware of what was being studied because the self-esteem questions were "embedded within" the surveys. This would allow for more honest answers, again making for a more valid study. The results could also be different when adding socioeconomic status and gender factors to the data collected. The authors say this is because socioeconomic status and gender are major factors in the developing self-concepts of adolescents.

Yunas (1996) studied the effects of teaching techniques on the self-concepts of high school students with learning disabilities. She hypothesized that positive teaching technique and a pleasant classroom atmosphere would have no effect on the self-esteem

of special education students. The students completed a pre-test on self-concept. The researcher implemented teaching techniques to encourage a positive learning environment. For example, the students were given choices on homework assignments. There was no information on the number of subjects or the subject selection. Therefore, it was unknown if selection was random and if the subject size was large enough to produce valid results. There was no significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores.

STUDENT PROGRAMS

Within the articles reviewed, a correlation was found between student participation in extra curricular activities and self-concept. Burnett (1983) ran an experiment to determine if participation in a "self-concept enhancement program" increased students' self-esteem. He used a control group to balance the study and maintain the highest possible validity. The hypothesis stated that the experimental group would show an increase in self-esteem by the end of the "self-concept enhancement program." The results supported the hypothesis, although there were some problems with the study. The total subject sample was only twenty students. The small sample makes for invalid results because not enough data was collected. In addition, the study took place in Australia in 1983. It is probable the results in the United States today would be different because of the time lapse.

Similar to Burnett (1983), Hendersen, Kelbeg and Engebretson (1992) studied the relationship between students' self-concept and participation in a stress management program. The hypothesis was supported and the participating students showed an

increase in self-concept. Like Burnett (1983), the study was small (65 subjects) which causes a problem with the validity of the findings.

A study done by Lavoritano and Segal (1992) showed slightly different results from Burnett (1983) and Henderson, Kelbeg and Engebretson (1992). Lavoritano and Segal (1992) discovered an increase in females' self-esteem after counseling. However, the male participants showed a decrease in self-esteem. A small subject sample of students from a Catholic school was randomly selected. The subjects participated in individual sessions with the school counselor and completed three closed surveys. The results may have been skewed because only Catholic school students were used. The students who attend these schools are generally from upper middle class families because private school tuition is expensive.

Fertman and Chubbs (1992) tested the relationship between adolescent activity involvement and self-concept. Similar to Lavoritano and Segal (1992), Fertman and Chubbs (1992) found no significant increase in the self-esteem of the experimental group. The control group showed a decrease in self-concept over the duration of the study. The subjects were randomly selected and were given a pre-test and a post-test. Also, closed questionnaires were distributed, making for more accurate result tabulations.

Finally, Robinson, Morrow, Kigin and Linderman (1991) researched the impact of participation in a peer-counseling program on high school students. The subjects were chosen from an urban secondary school. Each of the 1,972 students filled out an open-ended questionnaire to record who they would feel comfortable talking to about a problem. From the surveys, 27 subjects were chosen. The subjects were not randomly selected, therefore causing a problem with the design of the study. Only eight students

entered the peer-counseling program, which made the subject size too small for accurate results. The results showed the peer-counseling program increased the self-esteem of the counselors, as well as the clients.

GROUP COUNSELING PROGRAMS

There are several issues discussed in the literature reviewed which affects adolescents' self-esteem. These issues can be dealt with through group counseling programs run by a school counselor. Nassar, Hodges and Ollendick (1992) tested the correlation between self-concept and attitudes about food and body weight. Closed surveys were distributed to 159 seventh through ninth grade subjects. The questions included were on self-concept, eating disorders and dietary behaviors. The results showed a low self-concept was associated with "certain pathological eating behaviors."

Robinson and Frank (1994) conducted a study on the relation between self-esteem and sexual activity in teens. The subject sample was 141 male and 172 female high school students. Sixteen of the subjects were pregnant. There is no information on how the subjects were chosen, so it is unknown if the selection was random or voluntary. The subjects were racially balanced which adds to the validity of the study. Subjects completed surveys in a monitored classroom. The results showed sexual activity did not effect the self-esteem of male or female teens. However, males with a child showed lower self-esteem than childless male teens. Since teens are becoming sexually active at younger ages, the study is useful and should be replicated with a larger sample of teenagers with children. This would increase the data available and also increase the validity of the study.

Cook and Troike (1996) studied the effects of adolescent parenting on self-esteem. The participants were 85 pregnant and parenting teens that joined the Graduation Reality and Dual-Role Skills (GRADS) program. Eighty-five teens without children were also randomly selected as the control group. Closed question surveys were completed in monitored classrooms. The results showed no significant difference in the self-esteem of the parenting and non-parenting groups.

In conclusion, many of the studies reviewed used subject samples that were too small to produce valid results. There were also examples of outdated literature, as well as the absence of random subject selection. However, most of the researchers used closed surveys and monitored the subjects during the completion of the experiments/questionnaires.

Research has been done testing the correlation between self-concept and family situation, academic achievement, sexual activity, eating disorders and teen parenting. Much of the research showed no significant relationship between sexual activity or teen parenting and self-esteem. A negative correlation was found between eating disorders and a positive self-concept. The research on academic achievement and family situation in regard to self-concept is contradictory. Some researchers found a significant correlation, while others found no correlation. Continued study in this area would clarify which results are accurate, thereby increasing the data used by school counselors to help enhance the self-concepts of high school students.

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